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NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

TOP SECRET

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

INFORMATION

March 16, 1971

FROM: K. Wayne Smith

SUBJECT: Logistics and Force Diversion/Destruction Evidence
on South Laos

Problem

CIA has provided its estimate of the current logistics situation in South Laos and you have received DIA's rebuttal.

CIA maintains that:

-- "There is a large amount of indirect evidence suggesting that this year's tonnages will be higher [than last year's]." CIA cites the 108 ton per day average of 1970 versus the 140 ton average through just one of three passes in 1971. CIA surmises that if we had data on the inputs through the other two passes, input could run as high as 400 tons per day if one assumed proportional flows. Another intercept reports possibly 165 tons per day arriving shipped from BT32, which according to CIA is "the highest ever noted in enemy logistical traffic for a month." Other indirect evidence cited are reports from various Binh Trams that they have repeatedly exceeded their quotas.

-- After adding to previous supply flows the increment required to replace the lost Sihanoukville flow (estimated rather glibly by CIA at 20 tons per day) CIA says "Thus the ammunition and weapons that nightly move down the Ho Chi Minh trail seem adequate for maintaining a hot war in Indochina."

DIA's rebuttal argues as follows in an attempt to refute CIA's assessment:

TOP SECRET

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NSA, DIA reviews completed

TOP SECRET

2

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-- DIA has no evidence to support CIA's contention that this year's flows will exceed last year's. DIA notes that thus far this year input tonnages "are comparable" to last year's while throughput tonnages are well below those of a year ago.

-- DIA disagrees with CIA's inference that Binh Tram's reports of goal fulfillment constitute evidence that the communist supply system is reaching its goal.

The foregoing viewpoints constitute another episode in the continuous intelligence scandal of the Vietnam war:

-- CIA and DIA could both be correct. CIA may be correct that this year's tonnages will exceed last year's if they mean input tonnages. DIA also could be correct in asserting that throughput is less. It clearly is thus far. Moreover, even if input is much higher, losses to Lam Son, supplies consumed by the much-enlarged enemy force structure in South Laos, increased losses to more effective truck killing AC-130s, offsets plus losses on offsets to replace Sihanoukville, increased food shipments required to offset food requirements previously covered from Cambodia -- all these factors could yield a lower throughput than a year ago. The point is, full analysis of these statements shows them to be half truths. No single intelligence authority is responsible for putting together the entire picture. Thus we are left with no full appreciation for what we do know and do not know. Neither DIA or CIA is doing solid analysis.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

3

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[redacted] Neither agency compares the evidence from all sources and makes basic reliability judgements.

-- Both CIA and DIA refuse to face up to the fundamental issues. Both CIA and DIA have refused to relate supply flows to final end-use requirements: What throughput is required to support what level of enemy activity? Yet CIA will offer a statement to the effect that supply movements will allow the "hot war" to continue without ever saying what level of activity and associated supply requirement constitutes a "hot war."

I strongly believe that little will be gained by having a DIA/CIA confrontation at tomorrow's WSAG. Neither agency has provided you with a candid and comprehensive assessment of the logistics issue. Both agencies can and will defend their views successfully. This can be done because they have not ventured very far. It is easy to protect yourself with a phrase like "hot war." They should be criticized for saying too little rather than too much.

I attempt below to lay out a comprehensive analytical framework for an assessment of the situation in South Laos and the Lam Son operation. This framework encompasses two basic issues:

- logistics
- enemy force diversion and force destruction.

In my opinion too much attention has been given to the former and too little to the latter. They deserve at least equal weight in assessing the situation in South Laos and its impact on the war in Indo-China.

I have attempted to piece together the data I had in hand to illustrate portions of the analysis.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

4

Logistics Benefits

We need the following evidence to assess the logistics situation:

-- (1) Supply Inputs and Throughputs for the 1970-71 Dry Season

(a) We need evidence on supply inputs broken down by week and month and into pre-Lam Son, Lam Son, and post-Lam Son time periods. These estimates should be given separately by intelligence source [] etc.) and a final overall assessment provided by CIA and DIA. Evidence on the accuracy of each intelligence source should be provided. Some of this evidence is available.

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Supply input to the trail system got off to a late start due to the prolongation of the wet season into October 1969. The supply input weekly average rate caught up to last year's rate in December and thereafter fairly closely paralleled last year's effort in trend and magnitude through February 1971.

Average
Weekly

Tons	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar(-Mar 9)	Total
1969-70*	221	2024	1660	2768	3155	2273	44,394
1970-71	184	1124	1752	2830	2812	2978	41,301

Notes: * 1969-70 input does not include tonnage shipped via Sihanoukville.

March 1971 total input of 5956 tons departs greatly from 1970 trend which was downward at 4546 tons from a February 1970 input of 12,619 tons. February 1971 input was 11,248 tons. Normally in March the Mu Gia Pass route begins to phase down. However, this year input remains higher than usual at Mu Gia Pass, indicating continued high level of input activity. Input this March at Ban Karai Pass was 1208 tons, and input at the DMZ was 1644 -- most of which it is believed is destined for enemy forces opposing the Lam Son operation.

Problems like the following would be resolved by an analysis like that outlined above.

TOP SECRET

5

-- This evidence would tend to support a judgment that supply inputs in 1970-71 will exceed 1969-70 levels if it is true that the late monsoon forced the enemy to start his effort about a month later this year. On the other hand, did phase one of the offensive end a month later than phase one a year ago? Has the acceleration of the enemy's effort due to Lam Son put him back on last year's timetable?

-- Do we know enough to resolve the proportionality dispute between CIA and DIA on the relative importance of the three passes? CIA ventures a guess of equal proportionality. Is DIA's assertions that we don't know the best we can do?

(b) Evidence on throughput estimates in 1970 should also be provided broken down as described in (1) above. Serious problems underly the following series provided by DIA which shows that throughput of supplies estimated arriving at points of entry into South Vietnam and Cambodia is only 21% of the level of last year.

Throughput (RVN & Cambodia)

<u>Weekly</u> <u>Avg.</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mar</u> (thru 9 Mar)	<u>Total</u> (9 Mar
1969-70*	20	95	370	904	1478	984	13,507
1970-71	0	30	48	219	309	294	2,897

* Does not include tonnage arriving via Sihaoukville in 1969-70.

For this data series we need to know:

-- where these estimates come from;

-- what information is available on: supplies consumed in South Laos, supplies destroyed by bombing, and by Lam Son, supply offsets pluss losses on offsets to overcome loss of Sihanoukville, and losses to weather, etc.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

6

-- how the series would look if it were seasonably adjusted to account for the ~~the~~ monsoon this year.

Such an analysis would raise problems like the following:

-- CIA may be correct in its assertion that "tonnages" (read inputs) this year will exceed last year's. But DIA could also be correct in asserting that throughput will be less.

-- Truck kills have soared this year, primarily due to the fact that we now have 12 AC-130 gunships operating as opposed to only one last year. The AC-130 gunship is credited with 70% of truck kills. It takes about 2,500 trucks to operate the trail's logistic system. At the current rate of kills, there should be a turnover of truck inventory about every three weeks. Even if we accept DIA's estimate that 75% of damaged trucks can be repaired and returned to service, the current rate of truck kills should have required a turnover of inventory three times this dry season.

Truck Kills

<u>Weekly Avg. Truck Kills</u>	<u>Oct</u>	<u>Nov</u>	<u>Dec</u>	<u>Jan</u>	<u>Feb</u>	<u>Mar</u> (thru 9 Mar)	<u>Total</u> (to 9 Mar)
1969-70	20	120	148	290	311	298	4138
1970-71	7	28	193	499	643	804	7219

-- How has the loss of Sihanoukville increased the throughput (and thereby input) requirement? Does CIA's 20 ton per day estimate account for the losses the enemy would bear in South Laos?

(c) Can a special input/throughput series be designed to assess the impact of Lam Son operation, e.g., a BT32/B T34 comparison before, during and after the operation?

TOP SECRET

7

-- (2) Total Enemy Logistics Requirements via the Trail for Alternative Strategies/Activity Levels and the Implied Input/Throughput Requirement.

In order to assess the significance of various throughput levels we need to know what they might imply for possible enemy activity levels, e.g., protracted war, general offensive, two MR offensive. DIA and CIA have shied away from such an estimate even though they have the individual data pieces necessary to accomplish it. A useful way to calibrate the range of offensive activity would be to examine previous dry season flows before past offensives, adjust these to compare with 1970-71 Trail conditions and making alternative assumptions about stockpiles, estimate what types of military activities in 1971, the current throughput would support.

It is possible that input and throughput in 1970-71 dry season will exceed 1969-70 levels and the enemy could still fall short of meeting last year's requirement for combat. This might be the case if the 1971 increment did not offset what in the past was obtained via Sihanouville. The ultimate test of the significance of the logistics effort is not how it compares with last year's but the level of combat activity it will sustain.

-- (3) Other Logistics Evidence.

Also relevant to our overall logistics assessment is evidence on the following:

- Individual Binh Tram reports on goal achievement and shortfalls.
- Local logistics shortages, e.g., in MR's 1 or 2 of South Vietnam.
- What is the significance of recent changes in manpower infiltration for the logistics estimate?
- What is the significance of data on the expanded trail network in South Laos and the enemy's use of new roads, etc.?
- What do data on the mix of supplies (food, POL, ammunition, etc) tell us about current logistics capabilities compared with past experience?

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

8

-- What do the enemy's efforts to defend the Trail tell us about its importance to him?

-- (4) Concluding Logistics Assessment.

With the foregoing analysis, we could move to assessments of Lam Son in which one could have some confidence. The data need to be judged against alternative logistics success criteria for Lam Son. Such criteria should include the following justifications for Lam Son:

-- It cut the aggregate level of logistics throughput in 1971 and thereby forced the enemy to operate at a lower overall level of combat and/or to consume stockpiles.

-- The local disrupture efforts in MR 1 and 2 denied the enemy offensive opportunities this dry season.

-- The delays caused by Lam Son (and the late monsoon) caused the enemy to cancel operations in Cambodia and elsewhere because supplies did not arrive in time to begin offensive operations in the dry season.

-- The operation into South Laos forced the enemy to devote more resources that could be used elsewhere to restoring damage and expanding the Trail.

Force Division and Force Destruction Benefits

In my judgment, the strongest justification for Lam Son would rely on a force diversion/destruction rationale. Very briefly the issues are

-- (1) Did the Lam Son Operations pre-empt a Highland's and/or MR 1 or Cambodia Offensive by diverting forces designated for such offensives? There is some evidence that had ARVN not entered Laos, enemy units there would have mounted an offensive in the highlands of MR 2. General Abrams was reported in the February 25 Washington Post to have offered such a pre-emptive justification for Lam Son.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

9

A P. O. W. from the 64th NVA Regiment reported his unit, which entered South Vietnam in early January, was headed for the highlands to take part in an offensive. However, after arriving at Ban Dong in Laos on February 11, this unit was ordered to defend the area against ARVN attacks. A high level rallier reported in early August 1970 of enemy plans to mount a priority offensive in MR 2 against areas from which U.S. units had redeployed (the highlands) in order to take advantage of MR'2 short supply line.

We also have a report that units headed for Cambodia were held up in South Laos because of Lam Son.

In general, there is a serious question whether the enemy's roughly 35,000 combat troops in South Laos are all fully occupied for the long term. One might argue that the Laos effort was crucial if ARVN's threat was to be credible and the enemy's forces were not to be diverted to South Vietnam and Cambodia.

For a judgment on the force diversion benefits of Lam Son we need a complete OB appraisal and P. O. W., rallier and other reports on enemy intentions and movements for forces in South Laos. Most of this evidence is readily available.

-- (2) Did Lam Son disrupt the manpower infiltration effort? The enemy's 1970-71 manpower infiltrations effort has exhibited strange fluctuations. Possible these may in part be due to Lam Son which might be credited with disrupting the enemy's effort to build-up his forces for combat.

Infiltration data are readily available for such an assessment.

-- (3) ARVN and U.S. air support have hurt some NVA units badly, possibly placing them out of service for the dry season. We need to pull together the data on ARVN-inflicted casualties, losses to air strikes associated with Lam Son, [redacted] on the status of enemy units to arrive at an assessment of the enemy units put out of commission by Lam Son.

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TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

10

Other Benefits and the Costs of Lam Son.

Other benefits to Lam Son that should be weighed include possible improvements in ARVN effectiveness.

Costs that must be assessed include:

- Possible control losses in South Vietnam pursuant to ARVN diversions to Laos (thus far these appear to be slight).
 - Losses in ARVN combat effectiveness due to enemy attacks in Laos.
 - Increased NVA mobilization attributable to Lam Son.
- Other more general risk/cost considerations are:
- Risk of Chinese intervention,
 - Cost to Laotian neutralith,
 - Increased political opposition to war in U.S.

Conclusion

An assessment of the foregoing logistics and force diversion/destruction considerations would provide a sound basis for an initial judgment on the utility of the Lam Son operation.

TOP SECRET